

Easton Maudit VI, Northamptonshire - Architectural Stone

The site – a brief summary

Located at NGR SP 895582, at Easton Top Low, part of the Compton Estates, it was recorded as site 'Easton Maudit 6' by David Hall in his 1966 Bedfordshire Archaeological Journal article, though subsequently referred to as EM 7 by the 1979 RCHM Inventory of Archaeological sites in Central Northamptonshire. Excavations of a RB structure by the Bozeat Historical & Archaeological Society was carried out between 1987 and 1994 with some investigation of the surrounding compound's boundary walls and other features continuing until 2001. The site appears to have been occupied continuously from at least a later Iron Age, to early Anglo-Saxon date, with the notable exception of much of the third century.

The excavated area revealed two stone-footed and two substantial stone-built roundhouses or towers, the former pre-dating, the latter becoming incorporated into and flanking a corridor villa. This structure included a cellar and also a large central room with a smaller heated room adjoining.

Several rooms were surfaced with coarse limestone tesserae, these included the full length corridor, linking the stone-built circular structures and which themselves may have been similarly surfaced. Smaller numbers of finer tesserae give evidence of something grander in an unknown location.

The building, part of a site, overwhelmingly agricultural in nature, we believe to have been a Villa, was notable not only for its integration of circular structures but also for its use of some innovative roof tile forms. These include those pre-formed for use in the valleys of a cross-gabled roof along with square tegulae with flanges to the top and bottom of their undersides, seemingly making them functional only as a single row of tiles. These tile types are largely unknown elsewhere, (some have been found at the nearby Harrold Kilns site, which likely manufactured these) and are the subject of one of these small reports and inventories submitted to the Roman Finds Group in an effort to make this information more widely available.

Some plans of the site are included at the end of this report.

The assemblage of worked stone

This group comprises pieces recovered from the 1987-1994 excavation along with one from the demolition debris found in the pool in Area G which had contained the ritually buried plough coulter and associated weight. These were all found prior to the establishment of the Portable Antiquity Scheme, and are not recorded on that database. Unpublished elsewhere, as yet, I make it available to the Roman Finds Group membership. These artefacts, all others and the site archive are now the property of the Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre. Hopefully a more detailed account of the site and artefacts can be published in some form in due course

DRAWINGS PRESENTED AT VARIOUS SCALES AS STATED

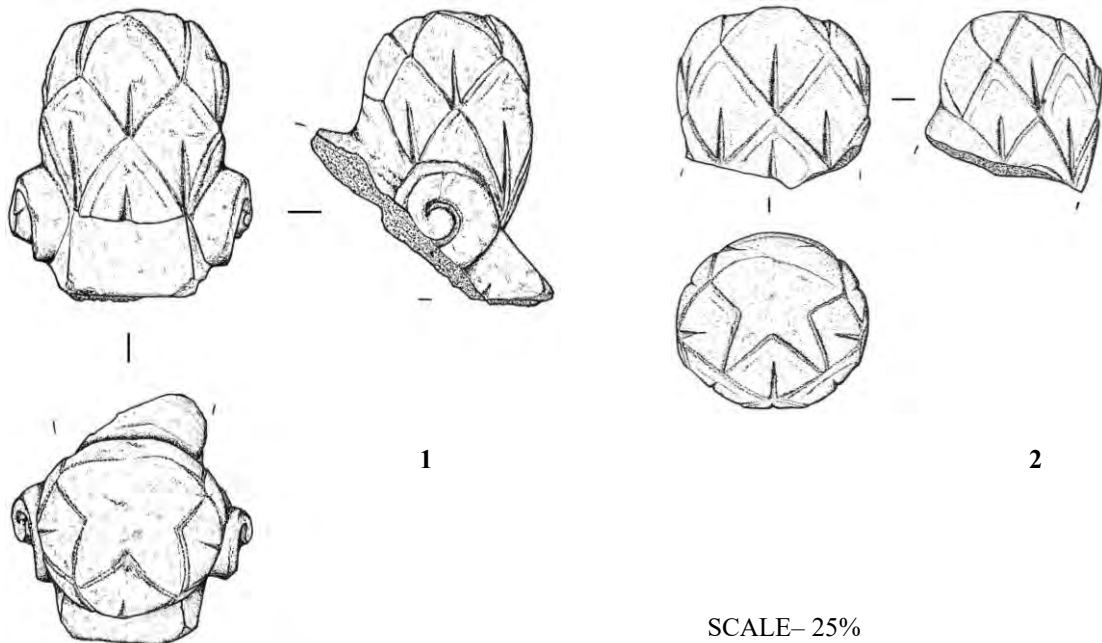
Carved Oolitic Limestone

A number of pieces of worked oolitic limestone, cream in colour and believed to be the reasonably locally sourced Barnack Rag Stone. The three principle pieces are sculpted to create very similar foliate 'heads', two of which were found in locations that suggested that they had fallen from the villa building in the vicinity of the central porch, although the roof of the nearby cellar is also a possible location. These two, SF 449/450 whilst similar in form have been executed in a different style, whilst a third example excavated from the plough burial pool, context 97/99xx, Area G, appears to be a more complete example in the style of SF 449. This most complete example has a sloping facet suggestive of the sculpture being worked to align with a pitched roof. We believe that being at the eaves level of single storeyed part of the building would be appropriate for a piece of this size, the ceramic finials found fallen in a similar location but which we believe to have come from the apex of the roof being of a considerably larger scale. That we found three of these artefacts suggest that a great many more originally adorned the building, more than could reasonably be fitted to a porch, the building did however have three front entrances. Whilst the foliate finish of the pieces is reminiscent of sculpted images of Pine cones, often associated with Mausoleum buildings, the addition of volute appendages in association with foliage we feel places these into another class of object. The form of these carvings when complete is not entirely clear but the foliage, a likely symbol of fertility is probably suitable to adorn the entrance of a native Briton's farmhouse.

The third sculpture to be found, SF 99069 is the most complete, its presence in the pool in Area G is a matter of conjecture. We believe it to simply be as a piece of wrecked building tipped there, but deposition as a symbol of closure as the pool went out of use may be considered. The pool is not without a ritual element, a valuable iron plough coulter and its accompanying lead weight, maybe an offering to induce fertility had been secreted behind the wall of the steepest side of the pool. We believe this was present whilst the pool was in use rather than representing a closure event, (a large bovine skull at the base of the pool, may represent that).

Further fragments of this stone range variously from uncertain intricately carved pieces and simpler mouldings, whilst poorer quality stone, incorporating rough fossiliferous strata seems to have been used for flat, but well surfaced slabs.

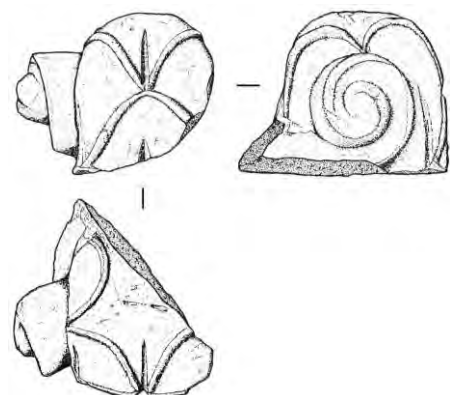
- 1** SF 99069 (9913/9914) – Demolition debris in plough burial pool
 Foliate ‘head’ carved from a cream coloured oolitic limestone, with traces of a white paint/wash over all surfaces. The base has remnants of fixing mortar, a sloping, well-smoothed angular facet ahead of the sculpture is suggestive of having been aligned with a pitched roof line. The ‘head’ is encased in leaves or scales, those in each layer overlapping those above and each with a central incision. Two prominent volutes are placed at the interface of the foliage and the smooth angled surface. Carving is 150mm high, 130mm wide and a minimum of 135mm from front to back.



- 2** SF 449 (7051) – Area B, central entrance porch
 A less complete example, only the merest trace of the volutes remain at the point of breakage. Essentially identical to **1**, I believe it probably to be the work of the same stone carver. Like the previous one, this has traces of a white paint/wash all over.

- 3** SF 450 (7051) – Area B, central entrance porch

Another rendition of the same manner of artefact as **1** & **2** believed created from the same stone stock. Executed in a different style, this example has fewer scales and instead of these overlapping, each is bordered by a raised half-round moulding. The surviving volute is very prominent and set higher than the others. Like the others, this has been covered in a white wash or paint, in addition, the central groove of the uppermost frontal? scale has traces of a brown paint/pigment adhering for its entire length. A logical reconstruction suggests that the piece was originally 140mm wide. Other incomplete, minimal dimensions are a height of 85mm and a front to back measurement of 105mm.



- 4 SF 445 (7051) – Area B-C, central entrance porch
 A piece of the same oolitic limestone, its small size makes interpretation difficult, probably part of a small column base, it appears to have a flat surface and on the outer edge, a half-round moulding having a diameter of some 600mm. The piece survives to a length of 80mm and has a minimum thickness of 35mm.

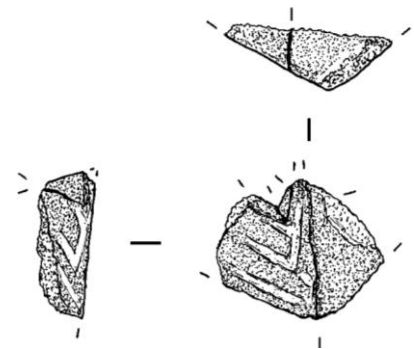
There is no trace of it having been painted white.

SCALE – 25%



- 5 SF 927 (context unknown)
 Small fragment of worked oolitic limestone. The piece survives to a maximum length of 40mm, nonetheless it exhibits five flat facets. Two bevelled faces meet at a corner, at their divergence, another facet descends away from them. Another two faces are cut, forming a deep recess or maybe a perforation, one face is parallel with the corner edge of the piece. The recess is framed with a number of smoothed, shallow grooves infilled with white paint, three beneath the recess meet another parallel with the bevelled corner.

SCALE – 50%

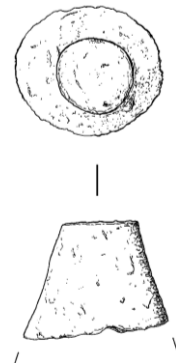


Other limestone fragments

- 6 SF 926 (8111) – Area C, R/3, layer 1a, dark soil with stones

A piece of limestone with sparse fossil inclusions, worked to form a truncated cone, broken at the broad end. The disc created by the truncation is some 38-41mm in diameter. Piece survives to a maximum of 60mm from the disc to the breakage. Examination of the breakage suggests that fracture may have occurred at a possible perforation bored through, the arc of which is suggested in the drawing. No tooling marks are visible, strangely several slight protrusions which could easily have been worked away remain. Fragment is interpreted as being the tip of a roof finial of some sort.

SCALE – 25%



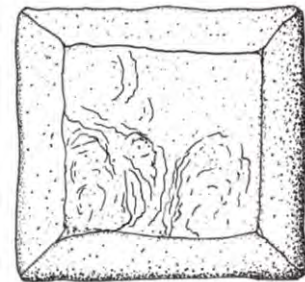
Stone plinths found in cellar

Two roughly tooled limestone plinths were found in-situ on the floor of the cellar, room 1. They were positioned so as to divide the floor/room into two, east-west and three, north-south. It is uncertain if these represent the base of full room-height pillars or of somewhat shorter altars maybe. A number of small rectangular bricks were found near to the southern plinth, possibly tumbled from a structure emanating from it, although nearby, other building materials, namely a pile of smashed sandy 'plaster', possibly for reuse of its sand and pigments in pots were stored. These bricks were not suitable for heavy load-bearing purposes. Feature no. 94187 was issued to the two stones and this serves also as a small find no. for the one stone which survived excavation, the other disintegrating.

7 SF 94187 (94187) – room 1, cellar floor

Limestone plinth measuring 380 x 330-360 x 120 mm. The lower parts of the edges are vertical, bearing vertical chiselling marks, the upper part of the four sides have concave chamfered mouldings of some 35°, creating a flat platform of 260 x 240 mm on which we believe a column was built.

SCALE – 10%



Not illustrated SF 94187(ii) (94187) – room 1, cellar floor

A second plinth, same as 7, disintegrated and not retained.



10cm

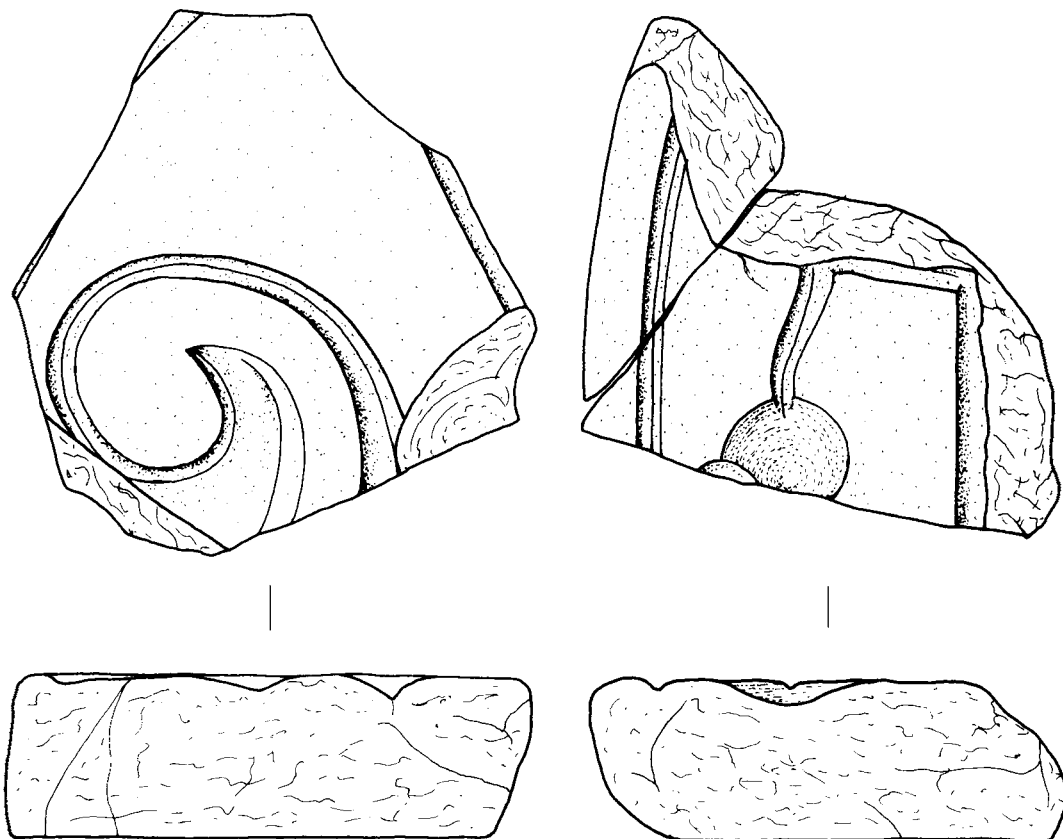
Carved Marble

Three fragments of a pale grey marble slab or sheet, with a flat surface, bearing deeply carved foliage trails, in which red-brown paint/pigment was applied. The fragments offer a tantalizing glimpse of some piece which was surely impressive. It has been suggested that the pieces are remnants of wall-cladding, that is most likely considering the scale and substantial weight of a quantity of it. I feel it must be noted that this marble has the same find-spot; that is, on and around the cellar's entrance ramp, as did a number of blocks of hard, (but hardly marble), chalk-like stone, (SF 929/930) these appeared to have been in the process of being reduced to make tesserae, perhaps this was scrap material destined for a similar reuse. Strangely and coincidentally, those chalk? blocks also bore traces of brown pigment on some of their faces.

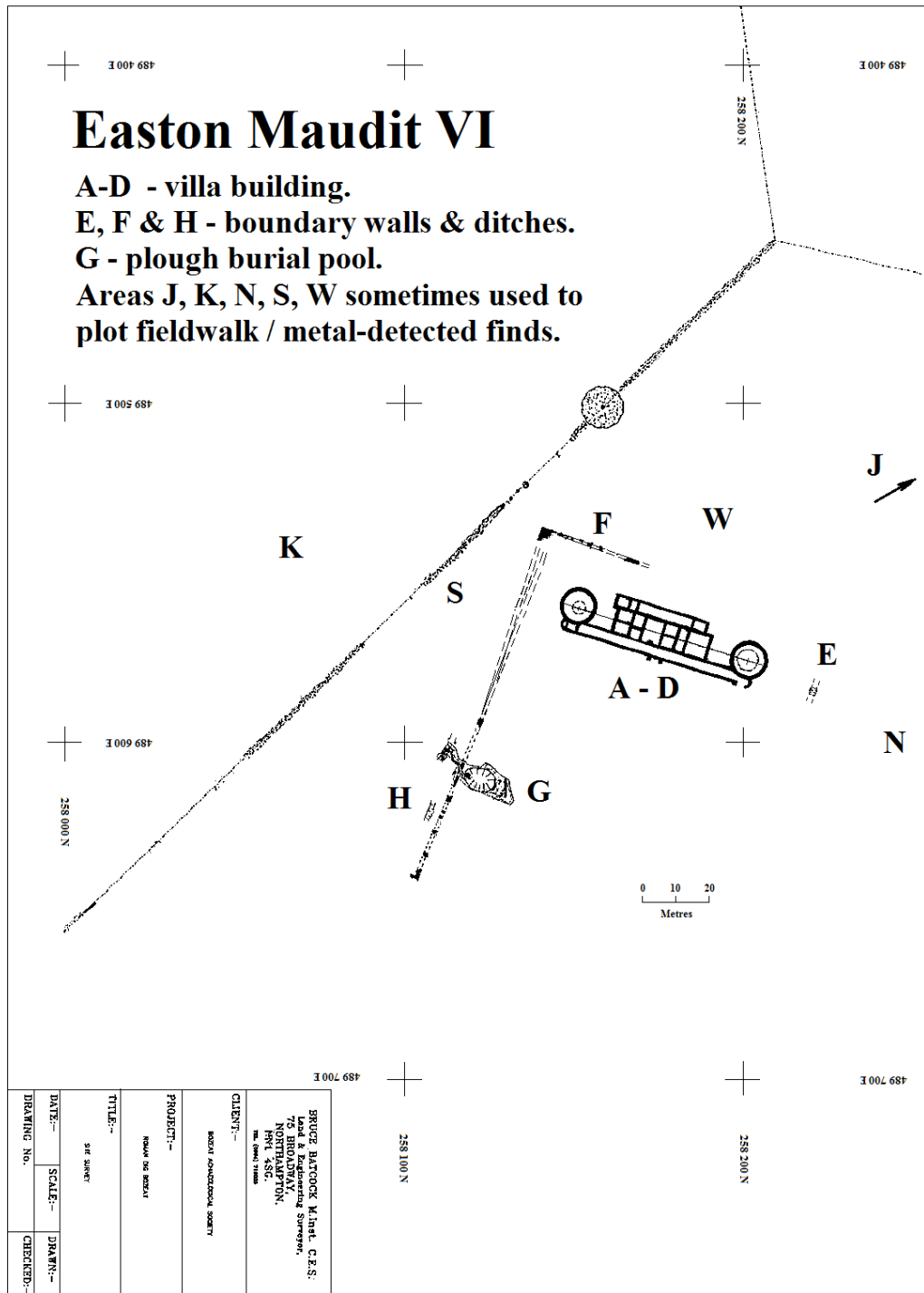
8 SF 392 (9216) – on the ramp leading to the cellar

Three pieces, two of which join, of marble sheet, pale grey/off-white in colour, some 20mm thick. One fragment exhibits a gently curving finished edge of about 450mm Ø. The finished face bears some deeply carved grooves and dimples, representing foliage trails and fruits/berries. One groove is inset from and follows the curving edge, I presume this one is a border rather than foliage. There are traces of red/brown paint/pigment adhering in the deepest recesses of these grooves.

SCALE – 100% ?



The following pages comprise a series of plans which should give some idea of the arrangement of this site.



Easton Maudit VI - The Four Roundhouses

This plan is provided to explain the many and various names and numbers which have been applied to the four stone-footed roundhouses found within the excavated area.

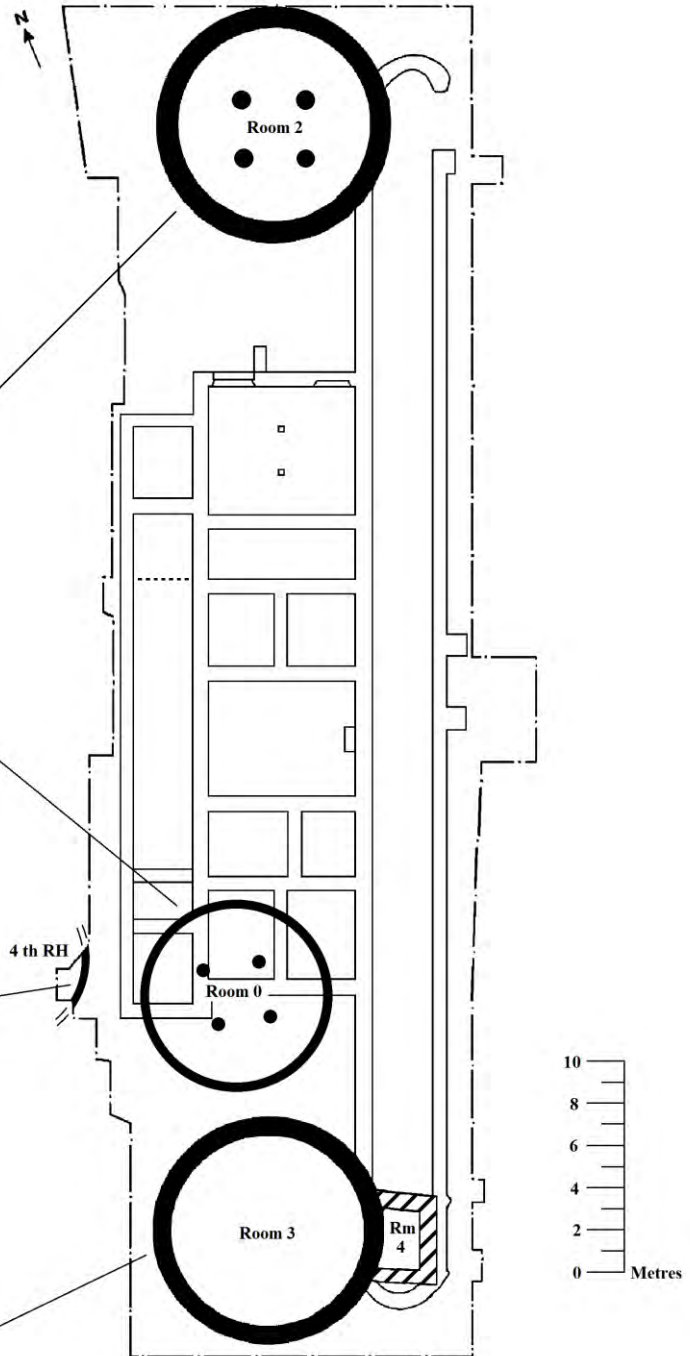
For clarity, all wall circuits are shown intact, omitting the cuts made into them variously by the villa walls, land drains and a ditch.

Northern roundhouse, Room 2 of the villa is also known as Roundhouse #2, it being the second to be found. Its wall is of coursed limestones on pitched limestone footings, the wall being #45 in the wall numbering sequence. Four solidly packed limestone pads are interpreted as being the base of supports for the building's roof, (and maybe a second storey).

Early Roman roundhouse, the third to be found, it is also referred to as Room 0, and sometimes as the ERRH. Its footings are a circuit of paired bunter pebbles, given context number (94175). These enclose a mortar floor, (8003). An arrangement of four pads of densely packed clay with stones, within and beneath this floor surface are interpreted as the bases for roof supports.






The fourth roundhouse, is given context number (94174) as a whole, only a very small part of it was within the excavated area. It featured in the excavation less substantially even than the plan suggests, the uncovered arc being cut by a later ditch. The structure appears to have stood on a circuit of bunter pebbles in a similar manner to that nearby. These pebbles on either side of the ditch are contexts (94156) and (94157), whilst the remnants of a mortar/clay floor shares number (94174) with the structure as a whole.

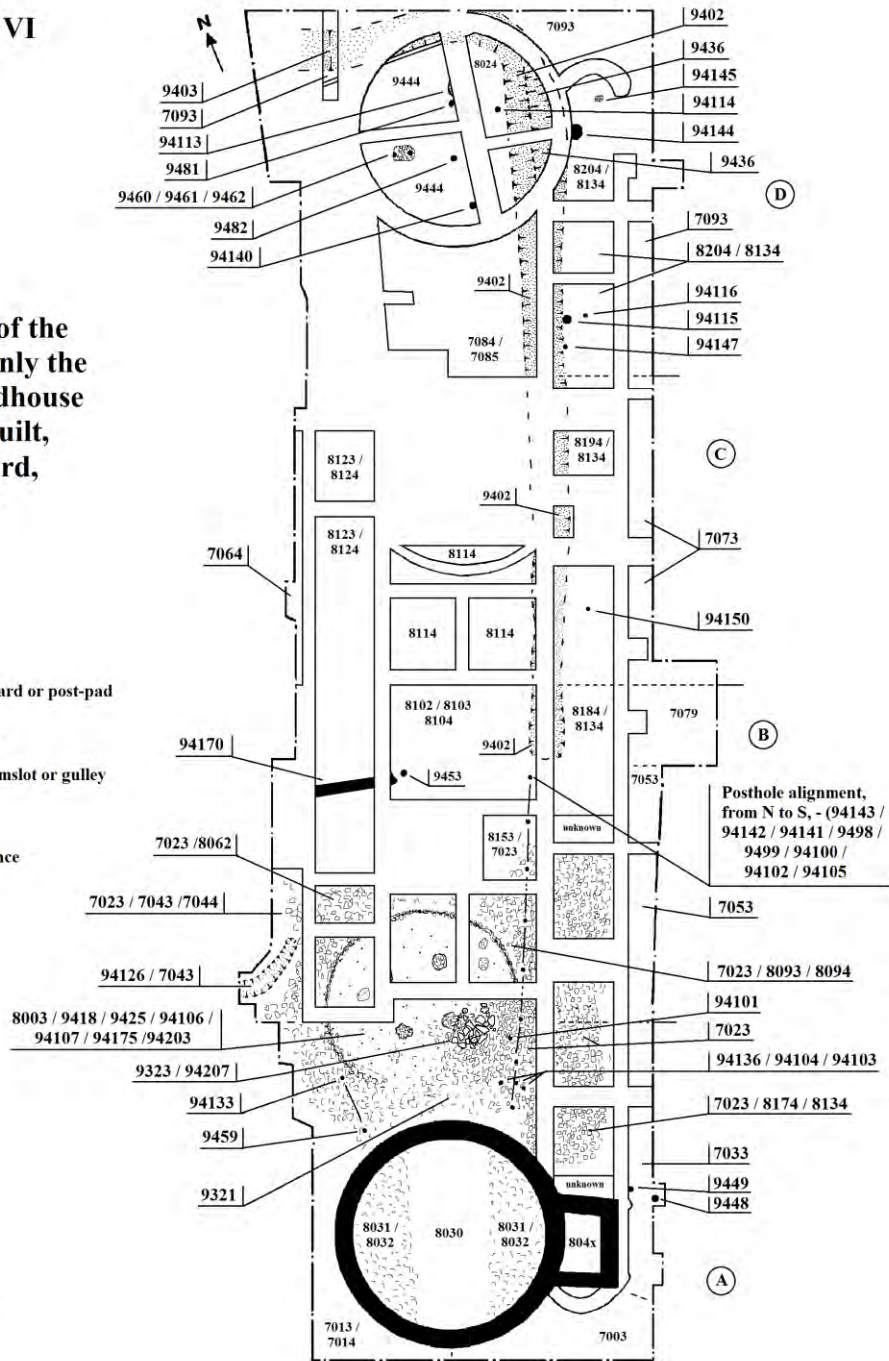
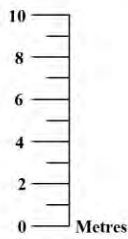
Southern roundhouse, Room 3 of the villa is also known as Roundhouse #1, and as Top roundhouse, it being the first to be found and located towards the top of the field. Its wall is of limestone, coursed on pitched footings. Wall is #1 in numbering sequence. This structure is believed to have once stood alone but for a porch, Room 4. We believe it was later incorporated into the villa, with the porch being amalgamated into the eastern corridor. Unlike Rooms 0 & 2, no substantial post pads to base roof supports were found. A circuit of modest sized postholes within the wall, not shown here, appears inadequate for this purpose.



Easton Maudit VI






Interpretation of the villa site with only the Southern roundhouse and its porch built, along with a yard, enclosing ditch and fences

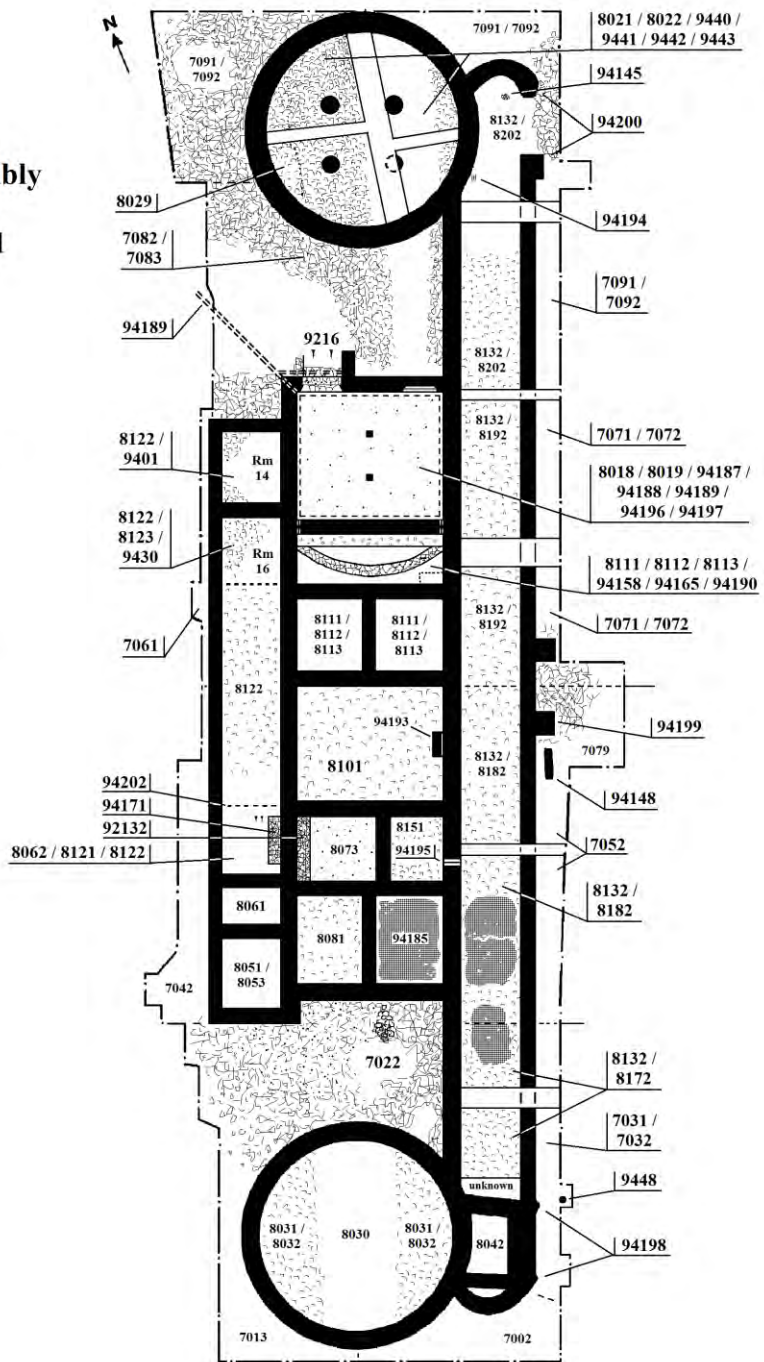
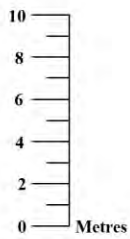
-  - Stone surface, of yard or post-pad
-  - Threshing surface
-  - Undetermined beamslot or gully
-  - Posthole
-  - Postholes in sequence



Easton Maudit VI

Interpretation of the villa at its most complete, possibly being reconfigured at the time of its destruction and abandonment

-  - Yard surface or other stonework.
-  - Clay berm.
-  - Substantially intact Tessellated floor surface.
-  - Stone subfloor, those in Rooms 10 & 13 are substantial enough to support a Tessellated floor, others are less so.
-  - Clay / Mortar floor, both subterranean



Easton Maudit VI
Wall and room numbering

